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MEETING OF RWANDA OPERATIONAL SUPPORT GROUP

OPENING REMARKS RELEASED IN FULL

- Good Morning. I would like to welcome you all to this first meeting of the Rwanda Operational Support Group, or "Friends of Rwanda" as some of us refer to it informally.
- I must say we were exceedingly pleased with the enthusiastic response to our proposal. We thank you for your strong interest and eagerness to participate.
- As Secretary Christopher outlined in his initial letter of invitation, we see the Rwanda Operational Support Group as an informal body which will help coordinate and support the efforts of the UN and the international community to address the crisis in Rwanda and the subregion.
- The international community has undertaken a massive humanitarian relief effort to address the immense human suffering brought on by the crisis. However, enormous effort is still required on several fronts to stabilize the situation and help promote conditions that will encourage refugee repatriation, national reconciliation, and lasting peace.
- While the war in Rwanda may be over, the underlying conflict is not:

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- Two million refugees remain outside the country with hundreds of thousands more displaced internally;
- The exiled leadership of the ousted interim government and their supporters consider the new government unacceptable;
- Extremist militias aligned with these forces are intimidating refugees who may wish to return and fomenting violence in the camps;
- Meanwhile, violent incidents have occurred inside Rwanda, raising fears among refugees and displaced persons about their safety should they return home;
- An overall political settlement and national reconciliation are distant goals.

-- Under these circumstances, the international community's first priority should be to ensure that fighting and widespread violence do not resume and that conditions are created, inside and outside Rwanda, that will lead to a lessening of tensions and a move to an overall resolution.

-- In line with this goal, we believe that the international community should focus its efforts on key near term goals designed to improve security in the subregion and create conditions inside Rwanda that will promote reconciliation.

-- We need to improve security and confidence inside Rwanda, through full and effective deployment of UNAMIR and accelerated deployment of human rights monitors.

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- We need to enhance security in the camps outside Rwanda.
- We need to identify and punish the planners of the genocide, through expedited action on the International Tribunal.
- We need to help improve conditions inside Rwanda through assistance to get the new government functioning, restart judicial processes, and restore basic services.
- We need to ensure that the new government makes good on its promise to uphold the basic principles of Arusha: powersharing, an integrated security force, and respect for human rights.
- These goals need to be pursued from a regional perspective, with the active involvement of Rwanda's neighbors, and with a close eye to the fragile condition in Burundi.
- As Secretary Christopher stated, this is indeed an ambitious undertaking, one that can only succeed through sustained, coordinated support by Rwanda's friends.
- We are indeed happy to see each of you here to initiate what we hope will be a very fruitful endeavor. We know you share our goals of peace and stability for the region and we look forward to working closely with you in the months ahead to see that these key objectives are achieved.

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